CHAPTER 3

*America in the British Empire*

**ANTICIPATION/REACTION**

*Directions:* Before you begin reading this chapter, place a check mark beside any of the following seven statements with which you now agree. Use the column entitled “Anticipation.” When you have completed your study of this chapter, come back to this section and place a check mark beside any of the statements with which you then agree. Use the column entitled “Reaction.” Note any variation in the placement of checkmarks from *anticipation* to *reaction* and explain why you changed your mind.

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*LEARNING OBJECTIVES*

*After reading Chapter 3 you should be able to:*

1. Define the basic assumptions of the British colonial system and describe its operation.
2. Assess the impact of the Great Awakening and Enlightenment on the spiritual and intellectual life of the colonies.
3. Describe the relationship between the French and Indian War and the coming of the American Revolution.

4. Trace the course of key events between 1763 and 1775 that worsened relations between England and the colonies.

5. Identify the principles the colonists used to justify their resistance to Parliament’s legislation between 1763 and 1775.

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

The British Colonial System

While English political and legal institutions took hold everywhere in the colonies, their distance from England combined with British political inefficiency to give colonists considerable political control over local affairs. There was a basic pattern to all colonial governments; most colonies had an appointed governor, council and judges, and all had elected representative assemblies. Assemblies, because they had financial power and popular support, usually controlled the government. While colonial legislators gradually gained power and experience, royal officials were handicapped by lack of tenure, impractical instructions, and few ways to influence the assemblies.

The British never developed an effective centralized government for the American colonies, and the colonies were never called upon to conform to a single set of governing principles. Even the Board of Trade created in 1696 was an inconsistently efficient policy-recommending agency with little power. In fact, Parliament nearly always accepted the board’s recommendations and rarely legislated specifically for the colonies, and the board only infrequently vetoed acts of colonial assemblies.

Mercantilism

English mercantilists believed that national power depended on national prosperity and that colonies could contribute to national wealth by supplying raw materials and by purchasing English manufactured goods. In the mercantilists’ view, national economic self-sufficiency and a favorable balance of trade were England’s ticket to power, merchants were the agents of national prosperity, and colonial markets were vital to the imperial system.

The Navigation Acts

The Navigation Acts were designed to implement mercantilists’ planned economy principles. They barred Dutch and all other foreign ships from England’s colonial ports, prohibited the colonists from marketing certain “enumerated articles” outside the empire, and required that all foreign imports destined for the colonies first be transshipped through England. The acts gave
southern tobacco planters a monopoly of their crop within the empire, paid bounties to colonial producers of indigo and naval stores, and regulated colonial manufacture of iron and woolen goods.

**The Effects of Mercantilism**

England was the colonies’ main trading partner, but much colonial trade and manufacturing was left untouched by the Navigation Laws. The Navigation system stimulated colonial shipbuilding, but it also caused colonists to pay higher prices for manufactured imports. The system had the potential for hampering colonial economic development, but serious problems were alleviated by the inefficiency of British enforcement; smuggling and bribery were common. The fact is, the colonial economy was almost continuously prosperous and practical British leaders followed a policy of “salutary neglect”—ignoring American violations of the Navigation Acts.

**The Great Awakening**

The Great Awakening had direct effects in all the colonies. Its outbreak in the 1730s ended a period of slackening religious fervor. George Whitefield’s oratorical brilliance and uncomplicated theology released an epidemic of religious enthusiasm for a forgiving God that responded to good intentions and was willing to grant salvation to all. The Awakening often split established churches along class lines, and it led many people to question all forms of authority.

**The Rise and Fall of Jonathan Edwards**

By 1750, except in the South, a traditionalist backlash had set in against Jonathan Edwards’ and other Awakening preachers’ religious enthusiasm. While it caused divisions and controversy, the Great Awakening also fostered religious toleration and it marks the time when the previously distinct histories of the colonies began to intersect. It was the first truly national event in American history and pointed ahead to an America marked by religious pluralism.

**The Enlightenment in America**

The Enlightenment had a great impact on American intellectuals. Enlightenment thinkers believed that universal natural laws governed all behavior. They saw God as the Creator, but not as an intrusive force in ordinary life. Human reason, they thought, not God’s revelations, were the key to knowledge. This view implied people’s ability to control their own destiny.

Enlightenment thinkers challenged orthodox religious beliefs and many embraced Deism, a faith that revered God for the wonder of his creation, not for his omnipotence. American intellectuals
avidly read and discussed the publications of Europe’s scientists, political theorists, and philosophers. As a result, ministers lost their monopoly of the intellectual life of America.

**Colonial Scientific Achievements**

Colonists contributed significantly to the collection of scientific knowledge. Ben Franklin was the representative Enlightenment man in America. He personified the colonies’ mid-eighteenth century intellectual climate that was characterized by curiosity, practicality, flexibility, and confidence.

**Repercussions of Distant Wars**

Seventeenth- and eighteenth-century mercantilistic competition for markets and raw materials generated conflict among European powers, their colonists, and the Indians in North America. Nevertheless, colonists played only a minor role in England’s colonial wars with France between 1689 and 1748. Frontier settlers were sometimes killed, some colonies suffered inflation and higher taxes, and some colonial soldiers were killed in militia campaigns against enemy strongholds like Louisbourg. These wars generated some trouble between England and the colonies, but the conflicts were seldom serious.

**The Great War for the Empire**

By the mid-eighteenth century, English colonists’ interest in land in the Ohio Valley was challenging France’s dominance in the area. The resulting showdown, called the French and Indian War, or Great War for the Empire, at first went poorly for the British. The English outnumbered French colonists, but British campaigns were mismanaged and most Native American tribes sided with the French. In 1756, William Pitt took charge of England’s war effort. He recognized the potential value of North America, so he poured the full resources of the empire into the campaign to drive the French from the continent. By 1760, both Quebec and Montreal had fallen, and France abandoned Canada to the British.

**The Peace of Paris**

The 1763 Treaty of Paris ended the Great War for the Empire. France lost almost all her American territory, while Britain took control of Canada and the eastern half of the Mississippi Valley. Britain also got East and West Florida from Spain, and (in a separate treaty) Spain received New Orleans and former French claims lying west of the Mississippi River. British regular troops and the royal treasury had cleared North America of the French threat to the colonial frontier. Colonial troops and assemblies contributed little to the fighting or costs of the
war except in defense of their own homes, but the English victory produced a great expression of loyalty to the king and mother country.

**Putting the Empire Right**

England now had a larger, more complex, and more costly empire—and a huge national debt. Colonists were eager to expand westward into the newly conquered territories, so British authorities now faced problems with conflicting land claimants, rival land companies, unpacified Indians, and fur traders hoping to hold back the wave of new settlement. Unfortunately for them, British officials failed to provide effective leadership. King George III proved to be inept, and even the best English statesmen were wholly ignorant of American conditions. They generally held the colonists in low regard, and many English people resented the colonists’ relative wealth and potential power.

**Tightening Imperial Controls**

The American Revolution resulted from the inefficient and ill-informed British government’s failure to deal effectively with postwar problems following the Great War for the Empire. Colonists, having grown used to managing their own affairs, resisted England’s postwar attempts to both restrict their freedom of action and to intervene in their affairs. Pontiac’s Rebellion provoked the English to proclaim a new western policy. This Proclamation of 1763 frustrated many colonial land development schemes by prohibiting settlement in the Ohio Valley. The British saw the Proclamation as a way to save money, prevent trouble with the Indians, and keep the colonists closely tied and subordinate to England. Americans disliked the new policy, but their protest was muted.

**The Sugar Act**

Even more alarming to colonists was Prime Minister George Grenville’s plan to use the new Sugar Tax—a revenue tax on colonial imports—to compel the colonists to help pay the costs of colonial administration. Grenville planned to end salutary neglect, smuggling, and the corruption and inefficiency of the customs service. The colonists saw the Sugar Act as a threat to their right as English subjects not to be taxed without their consent.

**American Colonists Demand Rights**

The British and Americans disagreed over the meaning of representation. By “virtual” representation, the English asserted that colonial interests were represented by every member of Parliament. American colonists insisted on “actual” representation that was geographically based, as with the colonial assemblies. Colonists were provincials who defined their obligations
to the empire very narrowly. They had prospered without a parliamentary tax burden before 1763, and they saw no reason to change. Still, calls for coordinated protest against the Sugar Act were met with widespread indifference. But in 1765, Parliament provided the measure necessary for coalescing colonial opinion.

**The Stamp Act: The Pot Set to Boiling**

The 1765 Stamp Act was an excise tax on printed matter that Grenville hoped would defray the costs of empire by raising revenue in the colonies. Colonial resistance was swift and widespread. Virginia’s Patrick Henry denied Parliament’s authority to tax the colonies, and the Stamp Act Congress claimed the colonists’ right to no taxation without representation. The Sons of Liberty initiated extralegal organized resistance against British tax policies, often resorting to violence. This marked the start of the revolution.

**Rioters or Rebels?**

The resort to violence worried the colonial elite who feared a social revolution within the colonies. But most colonists were property owners and could vote, so they were not social revolutionaries seeking to overthrow the established order. Protests against the Stamp Act were so strong because it was imposed while the colonies were still in a post-war depression and it struck directly at the interests of the most articulate and influential groups in America. More basically, it was a clear British rejection of the principle of “no taxation without representation;” thus, it was a threat to colonial self-government and an arbitrary invasion of the colonists’ constitutional rights as English subjects. Parliament’s Quartering Act, meant to support a standing army in the colonies, further heightened colonists’ fears that British authorities were conspiring to subvert their liberties.

**Taxation or Tyranny?**

Colonists saw the English system of balanced government that was designed to protect their liberties being corrupted by greedy and ambitious politicians. In fact, British leaders were not conspiratorial tyrants, but they were committed to centralizing imperial authority at the expense of colonial autonomy. They wanted a British army in America to control both the western Indians and troublesome colonists. British leaders saw the colonists as dependent “children” and refused to deal with them as equals. This arrogant and unrealistic attitude had as much to do with the coming of the revolution as any specific act of Parliament. Still, by resorting to resolutions, mob violence, and especially economic boycotts, colonists eventually forced Parliament to repeal the Stamp Act in 1766.
The Declaratory Act

When it repealed the Stamp Act, Parliament passed the Declaratory Act as a bold statement of Parliament’s authority and colonial subordination. The British and Americans now disagreed about the meaning of representation, constitution, and sovereignty. To the British, a constitution was the totality of laws, customs, and institutions that governed the realm. Americans defined a constitution as a written document that limited the powers of government. The British saw Parliament’s sovereignty as absolute, indivisible, and necessary for the preservation of social order. Americans were beginning to conceive of the possibility that “unconstitutional” Parliamentary laws had no force in America.

The Townshend Duties

Charles Townshend, new head of the British government in 1767, mistakenly believed that colonists objected only to direct taxes and would accept an indirect tax on trade. The Townshend duties imposed taxes on several colonial imports, and colonists responded with a boycott of British goods and efforts to stimulate colonial manufacturing. Townshend also insisted on strict enforcement of the trade laws and extraordinary penalties for smugglers. In response, Massachusetts issued a Circular Letter asserting the unconstitutionality of the Townshend duties, conservative John Dickinson stated plainly that Parliament had no right to tax the colonies, and radical Samuel Adams believed Parliament had no right to legislate for the colonies at all. The British dismissed these protests and sent troops to Boston.

The Boston Massacre

The presence of British troops in Boston created tensions that finally broke in the Boston Massacre in 1770. British troops, taunted by local citizens, fired upon a crowd and killed five colonists. In England, confrontation gave way to adjustment and the Townshend duties were repealed except for the tax on tea, and a post-massacre truce settled over the empire for the next two years.

The Pot Spills Over

Colonists broke the truce by burning a British customs ship in 1772, a crime against which no one could be found to testify. The British now viewed the colonists as utterly lawless. When news arrived that henceforth governors would be paid by the Crown and not by local assemblies, colonists knew they had lost their control of royal officials. They formed committees of correspondence to coordinate intercolonial resistance.
The Tea Act Crisis

In 1773, Prime Minister Lord North decided to assist the financially strapped British East India Company by allowing it to sell its tea directly to the colonies at bargain prices. Colonists viewed this as a diabolical attempt to entice them to violate their principles and buy the tea—on which they would have to pay the Townshend duty—and Parliament’s favoritism toward the East India Company threatened the pocketbooks of colonial merchants. So, in Boston, colonists threw the tea into the harbor, a crime British officials knew would go unpunished by an American jury. In Britain, leaders now agreed that colonists must be taught a lesson in obedience.

From Resistance to Revolution

In 1774, Parliament passed the Coercive Acts, which threatened the economic health and political freedom of Massachusetts. These unwise and unjust acts signaled a shift in British policy from persuasion and conciliation to coercion and punishment.

Since 1763, colonists had been driven by new British policies and a growing awareness of their common interests to take political action into their own hands and act in concert. When the First Continental Congress met in Philadelphia in 1775, Joseph Galloway called for a restructuring of the empire, but the majority of delegates were more radical; they denied Parliament had any authority to govern the colonies. Congress drafted a list of grievances and proposed that people take up arms to defend their rights. It also organized the Continental Association to enforce a total boycott against British goods. In the minds of the American people, the Revolution had already begun.

PEOPLE, PLACES, AND THINGS

Define the following:

mercantilism

favorable balance of trade

enumerated articles
salutary neglect

Deism

“no taxation without representation”

virtual and actual representation

provincials

direct and indirect taxation

boycott

Describe the following:

Navigation Acts

Iron and Wool Acts

Great Awakening

Enlightenment
Great War for the Empire

Treaty of Paris (1763)

Pontiac’s Rebellion

Proclamation of 1763

Sugar Act

Stamp Act

Declaratory Act

Circular Letter

Boston Massacre

Boston Tea Party
Identify the following:

Board of Trade

George Whitefield

Old and New Lights

Jonathan Edwards

Benjamin Franklin

Five Nations

William Pitt

George Grenville
SELF-TEST

Multiple-Choice Questions

1. The most effective governmental institution in the colonies was the
   A. appointed governor.
   B. elected assembly.
   C. appointed council.
   D. customs office.

2. English mercantilists believed that England’s power depended on
   A. finding gold and silver in America.
   B. a ruthless exploitation of the colonists.
   C. subsidizing colonial manufactures.
   D. a favorable balance of trade with other nations.
   A. banned Dutch ships from colonial ports.
   B. allowed the colonists to sell certain enumerated articles to foreign markets.
   C. failed to implement mercantilistic assumptions.
   D. were strictly but fairly enforced.

   A. hat
   B. shipbuilding
   C. iron
   D. woolen

5. One effect of the Great Awakening was that it
   A. weakened religious fervor in the colonies.
   B. promoted religious toleration in the colonies.
   C. unified colonial congregations.
   D. renewed colonists’ respect for authority.

6. Enlightenment thinkers believed that humankind’s future was tied to the
   A. arbitrary actions of an omnipotent God.
   B. instance of divine revelation.
   C. exercise of human reason.
   D. unpredictability of uncontrollable fate.

7. Which of the following statements is TRUE?
   A. Mercantilistic principles reduced the level of international conflict.
   B. Left alone by their imperial governments, French and English colonists in America had little reason for conflict.
   C. Before 1750, colonists played a minor role in the imperial wars between Britain and France.
   D. The early colonial wars created serious strains between England and the colonies.

8. William Pitt made Britain’s ________ the primary British objective in the French and Indian War.
   A. acquisition of the Caribbean sugar islands
   B. domination of North America
   C. banning of Dutch trade from America
   D. elimination of Indian resistance on the colonial frontier
9. In the 1763 Treaty of Paris,
   A. France lost all her North American possessions.
   B. England got New Orleans and former French territory west of the Mississippi River.
   C. Spain got East and West Florida.
   D. England got Canada.

10. Which of the following statements about the British in 1763 is NOT true?
    A. Most British officials knew little about America.
    B. British leaders held colonists in contempt.
    C. British officials finally began to exercise effective leadership of the empire.
    D. The expanded empire in America presented several new problems for British administration.

11. The Proclamation of 1763
    A. held that writs of assistance were unconstitutional.
    B. declared war on Chief Pontiac and his followers.
    C. invalidated all colonial land claims.
    D. prohibited colonial settlement in the Ohio Valley.

12. The Grenville administration did NOT enact
    A. new duties on glass, paint, and tea.
    B. direct taxes on all legal papers.
    C. lower taxes on West Indian sugar.
    D. strict enforcement of the trade laws.

13. Colonial resistance to the Sugar Act generated a debate between Parliament and the colonists about the definition of
    A. representation.
    B. imperialism.
    C. federalism.
    D. mercantilism.

14. Protest against the Stamp Act was very strong and widespread for all of the following reasons EXCEPT that it
    A. was imposed at a time when the colonial economy was depressed.
    B. provoked the most vocal interest groups in the colonies.
    C. was an indirect tax designed to regulate colonial trade.
    D. was an open threat to colonial self-government.
15. The Declaratory Act was
A. a statement of the colonists’ claim that they could not be taxed without their consent.
B. an invitation to colonists to work out a system for sharing governing power between Parliament and the colonial assemblies.
C. a bold assertion of Parliament’s sovereign power over the empire.
D. a strongly worded colonial protest against the Stamp Act.

16. Charles Townshend, author of the Townshend Acts in 1767, believed that colonists
A. made no distinction between direct and indirect taxes.
B. objected to both direct and indirect taxes.
C. objected only to indirect taxes.
D. objected only to direct taxes.

17. The Boston Massacre was directly followed by the
A. repeal of the Stamp Act.
B. enactment of the Declaratory Act.
C. repeal of the Townshend Acts.
D. enactment of the Quartering Act.

18. After the Gaspee was burned in 1772, colonists created _______ to coordinate intercolonial resistance to British “tyranny.”
A. the Continental Association
B. the Sons of Liberty
C. committees of correspondence
D. the First Continental Congress

19. Parliament intended the Tea Act to
A. compel the colonists to pay import taxes.
B. aid the financially troubled British East India Company.
C. punish Massachusetts for the Boston Tea Party.
D. provoke the colonies to armed rebellion.

20. Most delegates to the First Continental Congress
A. accepted the concept of virtual representation.
B. denied that Parliament had any authority to legislate for the colonies.
C. called for a restructuring of the British colonial system.
D. demanded independence for the colonies.
Essay Questions

1. Describe the relationship between mercantilistic assumptions and the operation of the Navigation Acts as central elements in the British colonial system.

2. Identify the basic beliefs and assumptions of the Enlightenment and the Great Awakening. Evaluate their importance to colonial development.

3. Explain how the Great War for the Empire can be seen as a major cause of the American Revolution.


5. Make an argument that the American colonists’ resistance to British authority between 1763 and 1775 was based on either principle or self-interest (pick one).

CRITICAL THINKING EXERCISE

Cause and Effect

Discerning cause-and-effect (or causal) relationships is perhaps the most important critical thinking skill for the study of history. Historians are always asking the cause-and-effect questions, how and why did something happen? It involves identifying a cause (whatever brings about something else) and an effect (the result of the cause). Cause-and-effect is the most basic organizing and structuring scheme for historical information.

Like classifying and comparing and contrasting, historians use cause-and-effect relationships to organize otherwise seemingly isolated facts into comprehensible patterns. These patterns take at least two forms. First, a causal chain is a sequence of events each of which was the effect of the preceding event that then becomes the cause of the next event until a whole series of causes produces a climactic event at the end of the chain. For example, the outcome of the Great War for the Empire caused the British to reorganize their North American empire, which resulted in the enactment of new tax laws that provoked colonial resistance, culminating in the American Revolution.
A second cause-and-effect pattern involves *contributory causes*—a set of causes that act *simultaneously* to bring about an effect. Each cause contributes to producing the effect, and each cause reinforces the other causes. Thus, the effect is the result of several different factors working together. For example, it might be said that the simultaneous interaction of the colonists’ assimilation of ideas from the Enlightenment, the consequences of the Great War for the Empire, and the ineffective handling of colonial issues by the British government contributed to the coming of the American Revolution.

Your task in the following cause-and-effect exercise is to rearrange the items in each group into a causal chain. Correctly arranged, the items will show a series of events, each of which will be the effect of the preceding event that then became the cause of the next event. Therefore, the chain must be sequential. The first event on your list (give it number 1) should be the event that initiated the chain, the last event (give it the highest number) on your list will be the last effect in the preceding chain. Number the intermediate events in their proper cause-and-effect sequence. Finally, link all the items in the group in a short explanatory paragraph that clearly expresses the cause-and-effect relationship among the items in the group. Group One is an example.

*Group One*

1. **End of the Great War for the Empire**
2. **Pontiac’s Rebellion**
3. **British need to maintain peace on the frontier**
4. **Proclamation of 1763**

The end of the Great War for the Empire resulted in Pontiac’s Rebellion, a defensive war against the westward migration of colonists into former French territory. As a way to minimize Indian-white conflict and maintain peace on the frontier, the British government adopted the Proclamation of 1763 that delayed the westward migration of colonists.

*Group Two*

1. **Sugar Act passed**
2. **British argue for virtual representation**
3. **British face new expenses in their expanded empire**
4. **Americans protest being taxed without their consent**

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________
Group 3

1. Declaratory Act passed
2. Sugar Act fails to produce needed revenue
3. Stamp Act Congress claims “no taxation without representation”
4. Stamp Act passed
5. Stamp Act repealed

Group 4

1. Circular Letter issued
2. Townshend duties adopted
3. Boston Massacre occurs
4. British send troops to Boston
5. Townshend duties repealed
Group 5

- Coercive Acts passed
- Tea Act passed
- First Continental Congress meets
- Boston Tea Party occurs
- British East India Company needs to dump surpluses